

Anyone Who Is Anyone

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Unbelievable and believable have become the same thing. Any view point is as good as any other. They used to call it relativity and now they call it the closest thing to the real thing. For one year he rented movies - VCR videos - and watched them on a twenty-five inch color Sony monitor at her apartment.

He watched the movies alone, late at night after she had gone to bed. He watched two- hundred-and-seventy-five movies that year. He rented the movies from World of Video. Part of the routine was going to the video store and going over and selecting what he could watch that night. He usually spent about fifteen to thirty minutes picking something out. The people who worked at the store knew him. He was their first customer. They had the impression that all he did was watch movies. Once, one of the employees asked him what he did. He told him he was a thief. He started to laugh but then said, no, I'm only kidding, a joke!

"No, really", he said, "I'm not doing anything right now".

Of course he lied. All he was doing was watching videos. World of Video was arranged into sections. Just like a library. New Releases. Horror. Sci-Fi. Gay and Adult films. Music videos. Musicals. Generals. Nostalgia. Foreign Language. Comedy. Children's Films. How-To Films. Two-for-One. Sleepers. And Documentaries.

You could reserve a film if it was out or if they didn't carry a particular title you could special order it from a catalog.

Sometimes before picking out a movie he'd talk to other customers about what they were going to watch.

Don't Look Now! "You going to watch that alone?", he'd ask.

"Yes. You ever see it?", the other customer would ask back.

"Twice, it's scary. Very scary. Donald Sutherland. Julie Christie. Venice, Italy."

"What's it about?", the customer would ask.

"Guilt", he'd say. "Delayed reaction to a daughter's death.. She drowns. Accidentally in the backyard. In two feet of water. You know, the father, Sutherland, he can't believe it. Can't believe she's gone. Thinks it's his fault. Should have been able to do something about it. Shame. He thinks he keeps seeing her alive, in the streets of Venice. They're there in Venice I think for a vacation. He thinks he keeps seeing his daughter on the bridges, the little streets, disappearing into side streets, the dark spots, into the alley ways.

"He tries to follow her. Chases after her. He doesn't catch up to what he sees till the end. Like a dream, only he's awake, doing it for real. And you

know, the thing is she's not an illusion. She's not someone who he just thinks he sees. She's there. If he could only catch up to her. Why is she running away he asks himself. Why won't she stop? Doesn't she know it's me? Her father?"

The customer asks him if he has any children.

"One daughter", he says, "She lives with her mother in Pittsburgh".

"Do you see her?", the customer asks.

"No, I haven't seen her in eight years. I see photographs of her. Once a year, around Christmas the mother sends me a photograph of her".

"What's her name?"

"Patricia. She's Patricia in her photograph. That's how I know her".

And that's what happens too. The talk goes on and away from the movies. The talk becomes independent from what it started out to be. Striking up the conversation. The conversation is struck up. And what's struck up becomes part of a new neighborhood ceremony. A strange new kind of cruise.

The next day the same thing.

"How was it?", he asks.

"Unbelievable.", the customer says. "I couldn't believe it. The little girl turned out to be a midget! It was real. The whole thing was so real".

"The real ones, they're the scaries", he says.

"I thought the little girl was alive", the customer says.

"So did the father", he says.

"Jesus, could you believe the size of the knife that midget stuck him with?"

"Could you believe where?", he says.

It started out when she gave him a home. Really the first he'd ever had.

The first rooms he could go to when it was time to come home. It's what she provided, and to go home is what he had always wanted.

He had always wanted to go back to a room where he could lie on a couch and watch t.v. and in the t.v. he could put a video movie. She gave him these things. She gave him what he wanted and had never had. And what had happened was, in the end, she wanted to kill him for what she had given him. "I'm sorry", she said, "it happened and you happened in it. If I had seen you one more time on the couch watching movies I would have killed you. I wanted to kill you. I'm sorry, but that's what I felt". I'm sorry too. That's what he said.

He said it to himself. He said too, he was still glad; it didn't matter that she felt those "things" turned him into half a person.

"I like coming home and doing nothing", he said. "I didn't want to come home and talk about the day and I didn't want to talk about us or our relationship. I didn't want to have sex. I didn't want excitement. And I didn't want to be exciting.

I needed a chance. I needed to know what the sensation of normalcy was. I needed to know how the other half lives".

He should have stayed in New York and tried to work things out with her. But when he met her to talk and maybe try to make up, what was him went out of his body. He couldn't physically function. He started to feel like he was tripping. His muscles wouldn't obey his commands. His heart actually hurt and started to pump too much adrenaline up the back of his neck. He couldn't hear himself talk and it scared him. He thought Jesus, I haven't felt this nuts since drugs. He told himself he had to go to another city. To the other side of the country. To Los Angeles.

He went to Kennedy Airport five hours before his plane was scheduled to take off. He sat in an airport bar. He had one beer. The waitress was understanding. It was Saturday. Not too many customers. The waitress and he talked. He told her how he couldn't hear the words he was speaking. Told her how he thought the words seemed to come out of someone else's mouth. She said aliens.

He said disbelief. He told her about the VCR movies he'd been watching for the last year and the t.v... About all he wanted to do was lie down on the couch and watch a movie and have a drink. About how he wanted to watch as many movies and drink as many drinks as he could before he fell asleep. He told her how he wanted to do this every night until he got sick or kicked-out. She asked which it was. He told her both. She said she wished she could watch movies and drink for a year. "Just like you," she said. She asked if it was worth it. He told her he had seen some great movies. "The sickness will go away if I can stop drinking", he said. He asked her if he watched movies and drank in her house would she kick him out. She said she'd probably join him. He said to himself, hmmmâ€I want to move to America, to the Pacific, to Southern California, want to go into artificial exileâ€I?

But he couldn't hear the words come out of his head. He said to himself, it's funny but I'll never see this woman again. Too bad I have to go. I wonder what it would be like to watch movies and drink at her house.

Pan Am. One hundred and fifteen dollars. One way. Cheap. The movie on the plane was "Country". Jessica Lange. Sam Shepard. About sticking it out. Staying put. Fighting for your rights. Fighting for your family and who you are. Fighting for your land. Traditions. Values. Right against wrong. He drank Canadian Club. Five of them. Lots of sugar. He watched the movie. He started to think about sex. How he wanted his bollacks sused up by sub's or gay ladies, true goddesses or an angel from hell. He thought about french and greek sessions, heavy squatting or queening, tv's, trims and photo party's. He started to think about how his thoughts didn't sound like him. He started thinking about personality. And thinking about how a personality can be different from the person who has it. It's not all about bringing what's inside out he thought. These days you're on your own. What it looks like and what it is. If you don't hold up a mirror or a silver cross to what you see, you're in trouble. He looked at his drink. He looked at the movie. Who are these

people? He asked himself. What are they talking about? What "Country"? The waitress was right. Aliens. He told himself he had to be protean. He told himself he could have style and be unreasonable at the same time.

In Los Angeles he started staying at the Magic Hotel, up behind Hollywood Boulevard on Franklin Street. He stayed in a small single room in the rear, away from the traffic. He stayed in the room for forty-eight hours before coming out to get something to eat or drink, before getting a newspaper, before seeing what it might be like to sit by the pool. He didn't make any phone calls to her for what was about three days and he didn't take or ask for any messages for the same amount of time. The people who worked at the hotel left him alone. They were very nice people. He was confused about leaving her and New York and his friends. He was homesick. He wanted to go to Paul's Lounge on Third Avenue there and watch a movie on the Advent, one of the movies Paul could pirate off HBO or Cinemax with his black box. Every night in the Magic Hotel he looked at the t.v. listing for New York. Like he would say to himself "It's two a.m. in New York, there's a choice. It's either "Escape from New York" on Cinemax, or "The Big Carnival" on Channel Nine's, "Nine All Night". That would be a tough one he'd say. "Escape from New York" I've seen three times and "The Big Carnival", which I think was originally called "Ace in the Hole", I've seen three times. "If I was in New York, watching one or the other would be a tie-breaker".

There are sixteen schools of psychotherapy with sixteen theories of personality and its disorders and the patients treated in one school seem to do as well or as poorly as patients treated in any other school.

He finally decided to put something up on one of his walls in his hotel room.

He said, "Since I can't size myself up, I might as well size someone else up". He decided to put up a picture of Steve McQueen. One of those big black and white personality posters. This was the second time he had put a poster of Steve McQueen on a wall in a room where he lived. The first poster of McQueen went up in 1964, in his bedroom in the house where he lived with his parents. He used to take a train into Harvard Square on Saturday and go to a poster store and pick out a poster of a Hollywood celebrity.

Someone or some company had just come out with these posters, big black and white, thirty by forty inch posters for a dollar each. There were about twenty-five to choose from. These pictures were fresh. They were big. They were cheap. They were available. And if anything could be new, they were new. Picking one out and putting one up felt like something a young artist should do. Now the poster is up again, in the room where he's staying. Rather than recovering, he's being renewed through doing it again. He wants to name the unnamable and hear it named. He wants to see himself as a personality instead of as a person. He wants to see personality as an inexhaustible mystery of the signified separate from the mundane closed-off simulacrum of the world-sign. Sure it's complicated, but anything to keep back the heavy hand of immanence.

Sure it's only a poster, but anything to keep from getting sucked up in a tornadoâ€a void where after you come down, you have to decide all over again which is which, what is what, and who is whoâ€!